

*Parsons*

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

N. H. MEDICAL SOCIETY

AT

CONCORD, JUNE 17, 1884,

BY

*J. W. PARSONS of Portsmouth.*

852  
**LITERARY.**  
SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE

— JUN 29 1910 —

MANCHESTER:

PRINTED BY JOHN B. CLARKE.

1884.



# PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

# N.H. MEDICAL SOCIETY

AT

CONCORD, JUNE 17, 1884,

BY

*J. W. PARSONS of Portsmouth.*

---

MANCHESTER:

PRINTED BY JOHN B. CLARKE.

1884.



## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

---

DR. J. W. PARSONS, PORTSMOUTH, N. H.

---

*Fellows of the New Hampshire Medical Society:—*

The swift, unceasing roll of time has added to the irrevocable past another year with its vast written and still vaster unwritten history, and has borne us on to another anniversary, which we are to celebrate by such professional work as shall raise our former excellent standard still higher, and by such social intercourse as will render our affiliations still stronger.

It is my very agreeable privilege to extend to you from this chair a hearty salutation on this the ninety-fourth anniversary of our society, and welcome you with all the cordiality which similar occasions enable us to express to one another once a year. I most keenly realize that this privilege is an honor, and a mark of your confidence, of which I hasten to declare to you my fullest appreciation.

I wish I had the diction of a Shakespeare, the philosophy of an Emerson, and the wit of a Holmes, to aid me in a satisfactory performance of this portion of the duties which our regulations make incumbent upon the presiding officer to discharge. The medical society of an adjoining state once adopted a resolution requiring the president to prepare and read, or present, an anniversary dissertation, or, in default of the same, to pay to the society the sum of fifteen dollars.

Gentlemen, if we had such a regulation, I should like to exhibit to you with what alacrity and liberality it would be my convenience to contribute to the exchequer of this association on this occasion. But, unfortunately for my audience, no such evasion of this duty has ever been countenanced by this society, and I

must therefore conform to a wise requirement, and, with the assurance of your earnest coöperation to make this convention a success, I beg your indulgence for my deficiencies in attempting to impartially serve you while in this honorable position.

The subject to which I shall first ask your attention for a few minutes is—

The Importance and Welfare of Medical Associations, especially our own Society.

We have assembled from the remotest districts of our state in the interests of the profession which it is our pride to represent, and to add another chapter to the already eventful history of our venerable society. Although this chapter may not contain the record of a discovery such as only occasionally bursts upon medical science, yet it will indicate to the profession throughout the country, and to those who are in the progress of knowledge to more than fill our places in the future, that we are not idle or unmindful of the magnitude of the work which lies beyond present medical acquirements, but that we are active, watchful and earnestly striving as individuals to do our part towards elucidating the many mysteries which beset our daily work, and laboring as a society for the emendation of the profession.

Much has been accomplished, but much more remains to be accomplished, for the possibilities of the future far exceed the realities of the past. Progress is the world's motto, and it is as boundless as eternity.

Medical associations have a portion of this work to perform, which can be achieved by no separate individual effort. Although associations do not make discoveries, they serve to stimulate the members to greater exertions and to a spirit of healthful rivalry, and to divert their minds from an unconscious routine into which all inadvertently fall, into new and broader channels of thought and investigation. All societies and associations are progressive in their tendencies. Although not incapable of mistakes, and although sometimes disturbed and divided by questions which all men cannot view with the same understanding, yet the combined wisdom and experience of the many must eventually determine the right. Members of every trade and profession have interests in common, for the advancement and protection of which association and concerted action are necessary.

The power and influence of association in every sphere in life are seen and felt on every hand in the world's general progress. The application of the arts and sciences to the wants of mankind, in the development and completion of the wonderful enterprises of the present age, could not have been made except by associated wisdom and capital. Nations and states are but associations for the better protection of their citizens, who are willing to submit to certain restrictions that other liberties may be the more securely obtained and completely enjoyed.

Civilization itself is but the gradual outgrowth and result of society and association. Its experiences and increasing necessities are lessons and demands which create the inventor, and stimulate the statesman and the student to deeper thought in the solution of the intricate problems of political economy, sociology and science.

The individual may originate a thought or a discovery, but it must be given to society in reality or imagination, that its power or practicability may be tested before its influence can be measured or its worth estimated.

There is an interdependence, an action and reaction, constantly existing between persons and society. In unity of purpose there is strength in action. The common good becomes a personal benefit. The members make the body, but the body makes the members potent.

It has been said with much truth, that there is a lack of association, a want of mingling among the people of this country, and among no class of its citizens has this want been more apparent and detrimental than in the medical profession.

Familiarity may breed contempt, but fellowship and acquaintance will engender respect. Much of the jealousy, bickering and want of harmony, which characterized the profession in former days, arose from lack of opportunity for communion, for the comparison and discussion of individual opinions and interests.

Quackery and empiricism, with their boasting pretensions, did much to cause this suspicion and want of confidence among physicians. But in this day of higher education, and the multiplication of opportunities for direct and indirect intercourse through

societies, medical journals and books, medical men have become more harmonious and liberal. The beneficial results of organization in advancing the cause of medical education and elevating the *morale* of the profession cannot be questioned, and may be more fully comprehended when we consider with what confusion and professional chaos we should now be afflicted, if there had never been an opportunity for conference over the many questions vital to ourselves and mankind.

So important are medical societies to the profession and the individual that a medical man's acquirements should not be considered complete until he has affiliated with some medical association. The duty to self and those he is to serve demands it, as well as the well recognized principle of unselfishness which characterizes the physician in freely donating to the world all discoveries.

Who can for a moment doubt the influence of this society upon the profession of the state? There is not a physician in the commonwealth, whether a member or not, who is not in some measure indebted to this society through its efforts to promote the individual interests of the profession, and advance the cause of medical science. Indeed the debt due this society does not wholly rest with the members of the profession; every citizen and the state are under obligation to us for the unselfish regard which we bestow upon all questions of public concern pertaining to our chosen vocation. We have been, and are, more eager to advise and labor in the cause of sanitary science than the people have ever been liberal in contributing to this end.

The individuals of no trade or vocation labor so sedulously to abridge the necessity of their calling, as those of the medical profession, as is abundantly shown in the vast amount of work bestowed upon preventive medicine. The watchful practitioner's duty to his patrons to-day is as much to instruct in the prevention of disease as to cure it by drugs, and the extensive amount of practical information in this direction, which has been freely given to the public, places every state and the nation under obligation to the medical faculty.

When the importance of medical societies, with their attendant opportunities for mental improvement, for elevating the ethical

standard of the profession and for social enjoyment, is considered, it becomes a lamentable fact that out of the five hundred or six hundred (this is only a rough estimate) regular physicians in this state, the names of only about two hundred appear on our roster. The real cause for this indifference to association and society work is not so apparent as to be easily stated. If the old or young physician stands aloof because of timidity to mingle with his professional brothers, which has arisen from a vague apprehension that he may be their inferior, he only adds to his weakness, and discards the occasion which will give to him the mental strength and the confidence to become their equals or superiors. If he excludes himself because of a selfish belief in his sententious superiority over the common fraternity, he displays an egotism the value of which he would be better able to estimate by placing himself in a position to compare his own with the shortcomings of others. A sound self-respect and true professional devotion are increased by these reunions, which afford occasion for the most intimate interchange of ideas upon the many practical and theoretical topics pertaining to our life's work, the study and cure of disease. The attrition of honest, friendly criticism, and fraternal meetings, quicken the intellect, polish the manners and arouse a degree of self-reliance which goes a great way towards securing public estimation. To the workers, associations afford opportunities which excel those of medical journals for the announcement and discussion of the results of their labors; to the drones, these conferences must serve as a stimulant to arouse their pride to a degree of healthful activity.

The influence of this society is an important educational power in the profession of the state, and for our own interests we should urge every physician who can affiliate with us to become a member. Every reputable member of our calling should be one of our number, if he values his own welfare and entertains a dutiful appreciation of the trust placed in him by his patrons for the care of their health and lives. He should avail himself of every means to enhance the personal and general progress of the profession, and no more fruitful occasions will be found for this purpose than in these reunions, where discussions of the difficulties which oppose us on every side are pregnant with experience, and where can be taken

that concerted action necessary to meet all topics of common import. Our meetings should be so attractive that their reputation should secure to us the united support of our medical men. To attain this end, every member must show some disposition to work. It is not enough to come here once a year, pay our dues, eat a dinner and depart, leaving those who have essays to read after the feast to talk to empty benches.

If we have imposed the task, for it is a task to many of us, of essayist upon a member who is ready to respond, we should at least accord to him the courtesy of an attentive audience. And here I must state that it does not seem to me that we receive the greatest measure of the benefit which we ought to derive from these papers, by allowing them to go into the hands of the committee on publication without discussion, as has been the custom. I am aware that the two days' session, which in reality includes only about twelve hours, is a short time in which to read and discuss many papers. But I think there can be no doubt that greater advantage would accrue from the reading and discussion of a few theses, than we now receive from the mere formal reading of many, which allows all the debatable points to fall flat and almost profitless upon our ears. If a member desires the discussion of an important topic which he has comprehensively stated to the society, it is almost impossible to obtain it under our present methods. An order of exercises and some system is necessary for the guidance of the meetings, and it would be a most useful innovation if disputants for every debatable paper could be appointed to open the discussion; and if members would indicate a greater willingness for work, no matter how slight, the executive committee could easily arrange a programme that could not fail to excite the liveliest interest and increase the practical value of our anniversary. Believing as I do in the profitableness of discussion of papers, I shall take the liberty, unless objection is made, of calling for debate of each paper read at this meeting. I would suggest that discussion immediately follow each dissertation while the subject is fresh in mind, and that each speaker be limited to five minutes, and that no member speak twice upon the same paper.

Although our meetings have as a rule yielded results indicating a commendable earnestness on the part of a few, yet there is a

want of that general enthusiasm which is necessary to the performance of the best work of which we are capable. Every member should be as willing to contribute to the general good as to enjoy the fruits of others' labor. My experience as a member of the executive committee for five years has given me opportunity to realize the difficulties of that committee in securing the necessary number of essayists to insure the success of each succeeding meeting.

The performance of any literary work by the majority of active practitioners must be a most laborious work, not wholly disagreeable, but nearly impossible from the constant interruptions to which they are liable, and from the wearing anxieties and perplexities which encompass them on every hand and which serve to distract them from the unusual labor.

But however feebly the duty may be performed, it should be done from that sense of obligation to the society which is due from every member, who should always show a spirit of willingness to assume the responsibility of any task which may be imposed upon him for the common good..

I believe much of the ever-present unwillingness of members to actively participate in society work arises from a lack of confidence in their ability to satisfactorily perform many of the duties pertaining to useful membership.

To these let it be said, that we are a band of co-workers laboring in the same cause, having the same interests, which induce mutual respect, and that in this hall we are all peers in the right which we possess to express our views upon any topic, be they ever so homely. If a member has doubtful opinions upon any subject, or perchance displays his ignorance, he is in a position to have his doubts discussed and his ignorance charitably and profitably exposed.

This is a school in which we are simultaneously teachers and students, and no man should be so selfish, or recreant to his duty to the profession, that he would not be willing to assume the position of the former in return for the enjoyment of the opportunities of the latter. I have heard it from the lips of those who take back seats at our meetings, and those who decline to join us when importuned, that they cannot perform any literary work ;

that they cannot make reports ; that they cannot formulate their ideas in a manner satisfactory to themselves. This is an unfounded supposition in many instances, for the effort has never been made. It has been said that a man may write at any time if he will set himself doggedly to it. We all have opinions, somewhat notorious for their diversity, based upon study and experience, and if the trial is made, words can be found for their expression, and if not novel to all, they may be instructive to some. The time and labor spent in the preparation of a thoughtful dissertation does not operate solely to the advantage of others, for the mental exercise will so develop the latent ability of the author as to increase his self-knowledge and insure greater future success. "Nothing succeeds like success." The momentum of one successful effort is felt in each succeeding struggle.

As it is with the student who acquires his knowledge so gradually that it is almost imperceptible, so it is with our society. Although a single meeting may not seem to yield the fullest measure of our expectations or desires, yet the influence flowing from these annual assemblages is a potential agency in promoting the prosperity of our profession not easily stated in brief words.

The duties of no occupation are more confining or exacting than those of a physician, and strict attention to any business is commendable : but when a medical man entertains the belief that his patrons can demand his whole time to the exclusion of a day's recreation, or the devotion of a few hours to the society of his fellow physicians for the purpose of giving and receiving new facts and experiences which we as students are constantly observing, he falls into an error which serves to limit his knowledge, deprives the profession of his experience, and does injustice to his patients.

Our profession is one in which Dives is very chary of his favors, and especially in our state, where practitioners are so largely located in the country that, with the long distance to travel and the meagerness of fees, the number of working hours consistent with even the rugged constitution of the average country doctor is not sufficient for him in which to accumulate such a competency as will permit extravagance or careless expenditure. But when a physician makes the plea that he cannot afford to be-

come a member, or attend the meetings of this society, he entertains a misapprehension, and fosters a delusion which will tend to lessen his success, and contract his already narrow sphere, and place him in unfavorable comparison with his progressive neighbor who can foresee the substantial return from an investment in a membership to this association. Both the time and money spent at our annual meetings are well employed and profitably invested.

I cannot believe that a single member of this society, who has been a constant attendant, can have so far failed to profit by them that he does not revert to them with satisfaction, and anticipate them with warm impatience. Such at least has been my experience. I feel under obligations to the society which I cannot repay. It has been a source of knowledge, and has given to me an opportunity to compare my own with others' qualifications and short-comings, which has served to give to me a confidence and an understanding of my profession which has been of daily profit, and which I could have secured from no other source. It has given to me the opportunity to form many pleasant associations and friendships which go far to make life more enjoyable. Indeed the personal acquaintance with the profession of the state alone more than repays a man for attendance here.

Medical education has received an immense impetus in the past ten years, and in no profession is there still such a cry for a higher education as among physicians. The strides in the various departments are so numerous, and the work of advancement so refined, that the uneducated mind cannot grasp and apply the knowledge which is necessary for the successful pursuit of a physician's labor at the present time. We are not in a position to dictate to medical schools any higher course of study, but we can exert an influence for which the time has come, for preventing the entrance upon the study of medicine of young men whose preparatory education is deficient. Few young men enter upon the study of medicine without consulting or placing themselves under the tutorship of a physician, and this opportunity should be seized by us to discourage every aspirant who cannot exhibit the proper qualifications. The doors should be wide open to the educated, but carefully guarded against the entrance of the ignorant, even

at the risk of occasionally excluding a brilliant mind. There is no way in which we can so easily and effectively enhance the standing of the profession as this.

We can do no more to carry out the design of the founders of this society as expressed in the words of its first president, Dr. Josiah Bartlett, who said: "I have long wished that the practice of medicine in this state, upon which the lives and health of our fellow-citizens depend, might be put under better regulations than in times past; and have reason to hope that the incorporation of the New Hampshire Medical Society, if properly attended by its Fellows, will produce effects greatly beneficial to the community, by encouraging genius and learning in the medical science, and discouraging ignorant and bold pretenders from practicing an art of which they have no knowledge."

The original charter for this body limited the number of members to seventy. An amendment passed in 1816 increased the number to two hundred. I would suggest that as the physicians in this state have largely increased since 1816, a committee be appointed to petition the legislature at its next session for an amendment increasing the number to five hundred.

We are rapidly approaching our one-hundredth anniversary, an occasion which we should celebrate by more than ordinary exercises: and as has been before suggested from this chair, it is expedient that some measures should be considered for the proper observance of our centennial anniversary. And perhaps it would be advisable to appoint a committee to consider what action, if any, it is necessary to take at this early date.

This brief plea for our medical society, and appeal for more willing, earnest performance of the duties of membership are made with the hope of arousing and encouraging, among some of us, an enthusiasm and confidence which will result in a more spontaneous participation in the work which must be performed to attain that reputation of which each member would be proud to boast, and which I firmly believe we have the ability to acquire.

At the risk of wearying you, permit me to occupy a little time in glancing at some of the defects of our registration law in which certain radical changes have been made during the past year. Any one who has given the subject of registration any consider-

able attention will at once realize that it is impossible, in the present state of the law, to obtain perfect registration returns, and that under any law the same conclusion would be true to some extent. So far as relates to births and deaths, the law looks to the medical profession for the proper returns. The burden of the work is put upon physicians. This arose from the fact, it is presumed, that they were the first to discover the great advantages of registration, and to urge its adoption, and because from all time they have been expected to perform any eleemosynary and gratuitous work required of them. This may have been right once, but it is believed the time is past when we should be required by law to write up genealogical and biographical sketches of those innocents whom we assist into an independent state of existence, and of those not so innocent whom our skill can no longer save from the inevitable death. Every individual at birth and death we are required to immortalize by preparing for record a brief personal and family sketch, for the benefit, not of physicians specially, but of the public, and the compensation for this historical work is the munificent sum of twenty-five cents for each record made.

By the recent modification of the law we are required to perform this misplaced service even for those who have no extra-uterine life, only a bodily existence. Indeed the still-born require duplicate favors of us, for each must be returned as a birth and death. And except for the general integrity of the members of the profession, and the meagreness of the fee, there might be some fears that the last mentioned requirement would operate as an incentive for the occurrence of more still births than otherwise would be if this double premium was not offered. What advantage can be derived from compelling the medical profession to return births and deaths, the writer has never been able to understand, after an annoying experience of ten years in performing this duty. If it is an advantage based on a greater degree of intelligence of physicians than could be obtained by delegating similar authority to other persons, we most gracefully acknowledge the compliment, but must still advocate a trial of other methods. There is no justice or necessity in asking us to perform public service for a mere pittance, which can be better accom-

plished by the proper public authorities, in the case of deaths at least, and should be performed by the persons more intimately interested in the case of births. There is no more reason or right in exacting this labor from a physician, than there would be in asking him to render any other information which might incidentally come to his knowledge through his business, and which would be of public benefit. At the first thought it would be considered a trivial duty to fill out a blank certificate of death, and so it is under favorable circumstances. But how many of us are present at the death of our patients to obtain the desired information, and if present, what an unpropitious moment to seek the practical details from friends distracted with grief! These details many cannot give except upon consulting records and other friends, and thus we are frequently compelled to make a special visit to obtain the desired information. And perchance if the family is a large one, we may find it inconvenient to spend an hour in prescribing for every ache and pain which can be remembered, because the family know it is an unsolicited visit, and therefore a good opportunity to secure gratuitous advice.

As an illustration of the effect of the present law upon the time of a busy practitioner, permit the relation of a supposative case: A physician is summoned ten miles to visit a patient sick with diphtheria. He visits and prescribes for the person and promises to call the next day. The following morning the physician receives a message that the patient is dead. The family reside miles from the post-office, and perhaps never go to it, so that communication by letter is impossible. The law demands that the physician shall make an immediate report of this death. If he does not wish to incur the risk of being complained of by some jealous rival or watchful enemy, or is anxious and particular to observe the law, he must leave important and urgent business and drive, it may be, over almost impassable roads to obtain the necessary information to make up this person's necrological record, and to inform the proper authorities that a disease dangerous to the public health has occurred in the town. And the unfortunate physician's duty under the law does not end here. He has obtained the information, but the law is not satisfied. It directs him to deliver these items of public and private interest

to the undertaker, town clerk, or other person superintending the burial of said deceased person. The physician is in a strange town and, perhaps with the risk of losing his route, he is directed to the proper person, who, unfortunately lives miles away, and who upon the doctor's arrival is not at home, he having gone with his family to the nearest village to procure the necessary funeral outfit. In despair the doctor tucks the certificate under the door, creeps with a smothered exclamation into his carriage, turns his horse homeward and deeply meditates on the wisdom of the law and the magnanimity of the state, which pays him twenty-five cents for his day's work, and as a penalty for being a physician.

Section four of the present law requires that the physician attending at last sickness—it does not state that the last medical attendant of a deceased person—shall fill out and deliver a certificate. This last sickness may extend over a period of months or years, and in the time, as is frequently the case, many physicians may have been in attendance, any one of whom may be called upon, or even all, to fill out the certificate under penalty of one hundred dollars' fine if he refuses. If the deceased person had only one medical attendant it is very doubtful whether that physician should state of what disease the patient died, if he has not been visited for weeks or months prior to his decease, for the reason of the possibility that some acute, intercurrent malady may have caused death, and thus make the statement worse than useless that he died of the chronic trouble.

In the case of suddenly fatal sickness, although the physician has seen the patient only when in a state of *articulo mortis*, with no opportunity perhaps to learn the history of the patient except from friends, he is still expected to fill the necessary certificate. For the benefit of accuracy in cases of positive diagnosis, all doubtful cases should be recorded as doubtful, unknown, or the probable cause of death stated as probable, rather than guess at the cause for the sake of recording something.

It is well known that a large percentage of births occur without the attendance of a physician.

To meet this fact, section two of the law requires that the "midwife or other person in charge, who shall attend, assist or

advise at the birth of any child, living or still-born, shall report the birth." This is so general in its application, that in many cases what becomes the duty of all concerned will be observed by none, and thus the law will defeat itself and often become inoperative. There are but few professed midwives, and any elderly woman of experience may be occasionally called upon to do all that is necessary at a natural labor as a mere act of kindness, and in most cases be as ignorant of her legal responsibility as the child around whose umbilical cord she puts the ligature.

Section ten of the registration law constitutes the town clerk's record of any birth or death *prima facie* evidence of such birth or death, in any judicial proceeding. In the instance of deaths, so far as relates to the physician's certificate, this is inventing a remarkable species of *prima facie* evidence. How many physicians sign their names to the certificate with the knowledge from personal inspection that the person is dead? In the writer's own experience in the past ten years, he could not state before a court of justice that one-half of the persons to whose death he has certified were dead from his positive, personal knowledge. They died in his absence, and he only knew of their death from hearsay, it may be of friends. But as the law now stands, with the addition of the undertaker's certificate, there can be but little opportunity for deception or mistake, and this matter is touched upon merely to show how loosely we may certify to that which we know but little about. We certify to the age, place of birth, name, and occupation, when in fact we may have no knowledge whatever of these data, and only take them from hearsay.

It is a great mistake to suppose that registration laws are for the sole purpose of ascertaining the number of births and deaths, and the causes of death. This is a small measure of the benefit for which a good registration law should be made. The chronological and genealogical record accompanying the certificate of a birth and death is the most valuable part of the record for future reference. Property questions of vast importance, family histories of the keenest interest, will constantly arise in the future, only to be settled by a thorough system of registration. And, in this connection, attention is called to a most egregious mistake of the present law, which directs that a birth shall be returned within

six days. It is a matter of fact of which we are all cognizant, that children rarely receive a name within this time. As it is by name that a person is known and designated in all social, business and legal relations, it is at once evident that the omission of the name from the birth record is omitting from the registration the most important item, if, as the writer believes, the registration is not a mere table of vital and mortuary statistics, but a most valuable genealogical record.

It may be said to this that the sex and date of birth would settle future questions and establish identity. But upon examination this will not appear so clear. Although sex would be easily established, perhaps the date could not be, as it is not a matter of daily reference among persons, and if there were a succession of births of the same sex in the same family, it would be difficult to identify the person in a future generation, a difficulty which would not be encountered if a full name were registered.

The writer does not design that these criticisms of the law shall be interpreted as indicating in any sense that he does not strongly advocate a good registration law, or that he is not fully aware of the difficulties which will present themselves in the attempt to put into execution any law which would insure more perfect registration. It is believed, however, that the law can be simplified and made more efficient, for as now observed it falls far short of yielding results sufficiently reliable for the solution of any of the important problems relating to the study of vital statistics.

It is easier to destroy than to construct, and to point to the defects of the law than to suggest the remedies; but the following recommendations are offered, with the belief that, if adopted, they would yield better results than could be secured in any other way.

First. The medical profession should not be the medium through which the returns should be made. If it must be done by physicians, then give them sufficient authority to secure as complete returns as possible, and reward them with some adequate compensation. The only material information which the physician should furnish in the case of deaths is the cause of death, and this he would willingly supply without reward, upon application of the proper authority. So far as relates to the return of deaths, the subject can be disposed of in a few words.

The necessary data should be obtained by the public authorities upon the application for a burial permit. No interment should be allowed without a permit, and no permit should be granted till the required facts are furnished so far as possible. This would place the responsibility where it belongs, and impose the duty upon persons who are elected, or appointed, and paid to perform such public work.

This, excepting for the unavoidable incompetency of public officials, would insure the most perfect registry possible. Some one person would be responsible, and greater accuracy and less confusion than now would be obtained. The proper person to perform this work should be the town or city clerk, or some person especially appointed.

The registration of births presents many greater obstacles than that of deaths, for obvious reasons. A large percentage of births occur without the attendance of a physician or a professional midwife, and, as the law now stands, hundreds of births must pass unrecorded.

A circular from the State Board of Health last year stated that 6,124 births and 5,000 deaths were reported; and that comparing these returns with the average percentages as given by accurate registration in other states and countries, there must have been 2,400 births and 1,800 deaths unreported. This of itself is a sufficient commentary on the inefficiency of the law as it existed last year, and doubtless will apply well to the results of the present year, at least so far as relates to births.

A full return of births can only be realized by making the parents the responsible parties for the record, under penalty of a heavy fine. It would require several years in which to educate the public to perform this duty, but when once fully adopted the results would be such as can be reached in no other way.

As has been already stated, the name of a person establishes his identity and individuality, and at once becomes an important factor in his relation to the state. If it is necessary that a person should obtain special legislation in order that he may have his name changed, how equally important it is that a name and the person's identity should be secured by law at the beginning of life!

For obvious reasons the naming of a child within six days after birth cannot be expected, and as a substitute for this period, in connection with the above suggested change in the law, that parents make the return of births, the time should be changed to thirty days, and within this time the naming of the child should be compulsory, for the purpose of making the returns more perfect, especially as a genealogical record.

The law demands that a record shall be made of still-born children, and that these shall also be returned as deaths. The advisability of this requirement has been questioned, but for the purpose of family history and avoiding as few exceptions to the application of the law as possible, it is better that it should remain as it is, although the mere numerical fact can afford little information of value to the student of vital statistics. Other data relating to the real or probable causes of still-births would be essential to make them of practical value, but to obtain these would so complicate the returns as to render it impracticable. The return of a still-birth as a death seems at first thought a superfluity, but for the reason of making the law as effective as possible in relation to burial permits, the continuance of the requirement is advisable. It would be of great additional service if all abortions and miscarriages, with the attending circumstances, could be obtained, but from manifest reasons this would be impossible.

To simplify and define the law, a reasonable decision of the State Board of Health informs us that it is not expected that still-births prior to the seventh month will be recorded.

Perhaps I have made much ado about nothing in going into the details of this subject, but I have been so annoyed by the requirements of the law in the past, that I cannot believe that I am an exception, and I feel that it is the duty of some one to utter sentiments which I think must be those of the profession generally. I therefore earnestly hope that our State Board of Health will take measures to secure such modification of the law as will relieve physicians of this misplaced duty, and such alterations as will insure a more reliable and valuable record.

In conclusion permit me to congratulate you upon the harmony

which has pervaded our former meetings and to express the hope that the same spirit may characterize those of the future, and may we leave such

**"Footprints on the sands of time"**

as shall give no uncertain signs of our devotion and loyalty to the New Hampshire Medical Society.



